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In my remarks this morning I'd like to discuss two aspects of reconciliation: its *scope and scale*, including its connection to peacebuilding; and the idea of reconciliation as a *lens* as well as a set of tools and working methods.

Scope and scale

Reconciliation is a word that is much used at the UN. Almost every mandate for peacekeeping and special political missions includes reconciliation as an objective, and five of the six countries on the agenda of the UN Peacebuilding Commission are undergoing some form of reconciliation process. The word is frequently referenced in the Security Council: for example, in one of the most wide-ranging council debates in recent years, under the Jordanian presidency in January 2014 on “Maintenance of international peace and security: War, its lessons, and the search for a permanent peace,” the word reconciliation was used by speakers more than 200 times.

Yet what we hear from the field is that in reality there is no general agreement on anything that might resemble a ‘unifying theory’ of reconciliation, and when it comes to the UN and other external actors there is often a lack of coordination and considerable organizational fragmentation.

Interestingly enough, however, there is a lot of practical experience from those who have gone through reconciliation processes in their own societies, and what I would like to do, in the interests of kicking off the discussion, is to list a number of propositions that have arisen when people have been asked to reflect on their experiences. These are not scientifically researched conclusions.

1. The first proposition is that reconciliation is about *looking forward as much as looking back* – that, while there needs to be recognition of harm done, truth telling and restitution where appropriate, there also

need to be some elements of a shared vision for the future, including a belief that the systems and structures that led to the harm done will be transformed – that in the end, the reconciliation process is about building just societies in the long term

2. Secondly, that although some of the tools in the reconciliation toolkit have been used at specific points in a perceived conflict cycle (after a peace agreement and before development resumes), the reality is that the process of reconciliation is a *long-term* one, and is applicable before, during and after conflict. The experiences in the Balkans and in Northern Ireland, or among communities of African descent in the Americas, show that the legacy of extreme and violent exclusion can last for generations, and that recurrence is the norm unless action is taken to interrupt cycles of violence.
3. Thirdly, that in most situations of large scale violence and human rights violations, whether direct or structural, *conventional justice is elusive*. The great majority of victims usually do not have their cases taken up in a court of law, and offenders are rarely brought to justice in a conventional sense. As a result, there is always a significant need for complementary processes of truth-telling, a need to recognize harm done in order to restore human dignity and the beginnings of trust. Additionally, *healing* is an integral part of what must happen – and our understanding of how to address large-scale trauma – particularly multi-generational trauma – is still limited.
4. Lastly, that reconciliation involves being ready to engage with *values* – think of the words that arise in these contexts - guilt, forgiveness, trust, mercy, hope. While we often approach reconciliation as a technical exercise, it involves human processes at a much deeper level, which have to do with the fundamentals of human relationships.

However, while this list of propositions gives the impression of great complexity, I should note that there are some approaches that allow us to frame reconciliation in a clear and simple way. One of my favorites is the one summarized by Brandon Hamber some 15 years ago from his work in Northern Ireland which is simply to say that if *peacebuilding is about people and the relationships between individuals, their communities and their governments*, that *reconciliation is simply the process of addressing the strengthening of those relationships*.

Reconciliation as a lens as much as a set of tools or working methods

Policy-makers like toolkits, and we often see reconciliation associated with a particular set of tools, such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, tribunals, indigenous truth telling mechanisms, national dialogues, and so on. Tools are necessary, and all of these may play an important part in broader reconciliation. But a focus on tools can take us into an unproductive conversation about sequencing and detailed process – is it time for a TRC? – rather than a focus on fostering broader processes of healing and inclusion.

A step forward from this can be to see these tools as part of a core set of *working methods that has to do with building, repairing and strengthening relationships*, that are not time bound, or linked to a specific point in a conflict cycle, and include issues such as fostering dispute resolution mechanisms, insider mediation, and so on. This is an approach that has the potential of paying dividends in some of the thornier problems that we often face: land issues for example. The reality of land tenure in many fragile and conflict affected contexts is that formal legal redress is unavailable and the chain of historical ownership (e.g. overlapping layers of displacement and return, state or elite expropriation, etc.) is almost impossible to unravel: at a recent meeting we hosted on this, the conclusion was that what was needed was a whole set of Solomon-like pragmatic judgments to be made at all scales and in large numbers, and that the capacity that was required was therefore teams of local mediation trainers rather than land register technicians.

A further step, beyond tools and working methods, is to consider reconciliation as a *lens*. In the development world, we have become familiar with the concept of ‘do no harm’, and increasingly development and humanitarian actors in these contexts seek to make their actions conflict sensitive – so, for example, we have the emergence of the “Peace Promise” in the context of the World Humanitarian Summit, where a wide range of humanitarian agencies committed to respect peacebuilding principles in their humanitarian work. But increasingly it appears that we can and should go further, that where appropriate and possible, we should seek to make humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actions *actively restorative*: that is, that they go beyond ‘do no harm’ into a space of seeking to directly address contextual exclusion and imbalance. For example, AFSC has supported communities in Burundi with developing micro-savings and lending programs which

were designed not only to support livelihoods, but were managed by villagers as communal activities which crossed gender and ethnic divisions. To make it work, people needed to come together, and where necessary these activities would be supported by trauma healing. So here is an example of an approach that on the face of it is economic, but which is designed to support reconciliation.

This lens approach can be particularly helpful in situations where more direct entry points to peacebuilding may be problematic politically, and has received considerable support following the adoption by heads of state and government just over a year ago of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a commitment by all 193 UN member states to mainstream peace, justice and inclusion throughout all forms of development action. Reconciliation in this context can now be seen as a path for national actors to take towards fulfilling their 2030 Agenda obligations, and thus part of supporting effective and sustainable development in their country.

Conclusion

So to conclude, I would propose for your consideration the idea that reconciliation is a multi-generational process, that it is applicable wherever there are divided societies - at any level of development, that it has as much to do with prevention as it does with post conflict recovery, with the future as much as the past.

Furthermore, while reconciliation is intimately connected with structural issues of inclusion and social justice in the longer term, at any one point in time the key is often to identify practical and realistic actions that, while consistent with the longer term ends, can move ahead irrespective of the ebb and flow of the larger political dynamics, and that such approaches can usefully combine the application of a restorative lens to a wide range of humanitarian, development, and commercial actions.